To Whom:

As a member of Hartford's Advisory Commission on the Environment (ACOTE), I am exceedingly concerned that Scotts Miracle-Gro company has genetically engineered a strain of Kentucky bluegrass to resist Roundup herbicide, scheduled to go into commercial production in 2015 and be marketed to consumers in 2016.

I agree with Senator Don Williams that this does not belong on our lawns and in our parks in CT. The environmental risks of GMOs could go beyond anything we have seen before, given the nature of genetic modification.

I strongly urge you to support HB 5330 and SB 443 with an amendment to ban the sale or use of genetically engineered grass and other genetically engineered landscaping plants.

It is urgent for Connecticut to pass a ban on sale of genetically-modified grass and other perennials now. To help keep our children and the environment safe from toxic pesticides, these bills and the amendment need your support today and until they are passed.

I have included background information below that you have probably seen before.
Thank you, and I look forward to hearing back on this issue.

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BACKGROUND INFO

Scotts Miracle-Gro company has genetically engineered a strain of Kentucky bluegrass to resist Roundup herbicide. It has been reported that employees of the Ohio company will plant this GMO grass seed this summer. It is scheduled to go into commercial production in 2015 and be marketed to consumers in 2016.(1.)
Kentucky bluegrass is a valuable pasture plant that grows well in fertile soil. It is often used in a mix of other grasses and legumes for grazing animals and making hay. It was brought to this continent by the Europeans "to feed their livestock because it was nutritious, fast growing, and able to stand up to heavy grazers." (2.)
Bluegrass is also widely used alone or with other grasses (and sometimes legumes) for lawns and playing fields.
Never missing an opportunity to sell more of Monsanto's Roundup herbicide and encourage lawns that look as close as possible to astroturf, Scotts Miracle-Gro came up with Roundup Ready Kentucky bluegrass.
The idea is that you plant your lawn, playing field or golf course with this fancy and more expensive seed. Once it grows, weed control is easy. Just spray Roundup and every plant except the genetically modified grass is killed. There you have it! A bluegrass monoculture.

Much of the soil life is stressed or killed by the Roundup, if it hasn't already been destroyed by the chemical fertilizers bluegrass demands. Landscapers call it a "spoiled brat" plant because of the coddling a bluegrass lawn needs in suburban soils.

This strategy also ignores that fact that many "weeds" are actually beautiful wildflowers, healthful herbs, delicious greens, important food sources for birds, insects or soil organisms and even indicators of bad turf management.

This is the same weed control strategy being used for crops such as Roundup Ready corn, soybeans, sugar beets, cotton and alfalfa. This "high tech, science based" system is already failing less than 20 years after it went into use. The biotech industry has now developed seeds that resist even more dangerous herbicides such as 2,4-D, one half of Agent Orange, the defoliant used in the Vietnam war.

This chemical arms race for higher profits is bound to end badly. We know that there are other ways to care for the earth and grow our food.

Regulation?

Of course this GMO must be regulated by the government, right? Think again: It isn't! Because of a loophole in the law and the way this genetic modification was done, there is no regulation or oversight by any government body. None!

As the investment website *The Motley Fool* wrote: "..., the introduction of a GMO strain into lawns across the country would be even more insidious than the crop variants [corn, soy and the like], because the Agriculture Department is leaving this seed unregulated. It exempted the strain in 2011 because its creation avoided the use of plant pathogens, so Scotts will be left to self-regulate its proliferation." (1.)

Reasons for Concern: Unanswered Questions

According to the University of Nebraska, "Grasses are the main cause of pollen allergies in the world. Kentucky bluegrass produces more pollen than any other grass in the United States. It ranks second to ragweed in causing hay fever." (2.)

If bluegrass is genetically engineered to be a sales tool for Roundup herbicide, how does that affect its ability to cause hay fever and other allergic symptoms? The government isn't asking.

Although a regularly-mowed bluegrass lawn may not flower and produce pollen, sometimes lawns aren't mowed. In May, the grass blooms and sheds pollen for days as the flowers open up. That pollen could carry the mutant genes far and wide.

Bluegrass also spreads by sending out runners, so it may get a chance to flower and produce seeds in a perennial border, vegetable garden or under your neighbor's fence. It just wants to spread and reproduce.

As its abundant pollen blows in the wind from the residential, corporate park or municipal lawn to the pasture next door, how much of the bluegrass seed produced in that pasture carries the genetic modification? How quickly does the genetic modification become dominant in the pasture's bluegrass?

It is unthinkable that these questions have not been addressed.

How our food supply is affected:

Maybe you think that this Kentucky bluegrass is just for lawns and playing fields and you are mostly concerned about what you and your family eat.

Putting animals such as chickens, rabbits, goats, sheep and cows on pasture is an important strategy for maintaining animal health, building soil health, reducing feed costs and raising healthier animal products.

Once the Roundup Ready genetic trait has spread to pastures, it likely will put an end to any organic or non-GMO pastured meat production in Connecticut. Yet, there is an ever increasing demand for organic and non-GMO meat and dairy products. The animals that produce these products are not allowed to eat genetically modified organisms.

If this and similar grass seeds are allowed to be planted, at some point in the future, all pastures will contain genetically modified bluegrass. It could be 10 years or 50 years in the future. No one knows.

Monocultures are inherently unstable. Most land care professionals recommend planting a mix of grasses, perhaps fescue and rye with bluegrass to provide resilience and good color year round. Many suggest adding clover to provide nitrogen. (3.) Temperatures, water availability and other factors change during the year and from year to year. With a mix of grasses, one will grow better if another is stressed, a perfect example of the basic resilience that diversity provides. This simple strategy for resilience is completely ignored and thwarted by Roundup Ready bluegrass.